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ABSTRACT

Project CLASS (Coordinated Learning Activities for School Staff) provides a vehicle for local school systems, colleges, and universities to join together in the identification of teacher training and inservice needs and the development and execution of graduate studies and/or staff development programs designed to meet those needs. This document suggests the following guidelines for college and university administrators who are interested in the development of such a cooperative program: (1) establish a philosophic base of agreement within the faculty; (2) provide a structure for faculty planning and involvement that includes both college faculty and public school professionals; (3) provide a management structure that shares decision-making between the college or university and the public school system; (4) determine what system will be used for granting academic credit for the attainment of competence based on local school needs; (5) develop a staffing plan that provides for lower student/professor ratio than traditional graduate programs; (6) provide instructional resources appropriate for individualized study which are transportable to a field setting; (7) provide a system for the storage, retrieval, and management of individualized instructional materials; (8) prepare process manuals for each major element of the program; and (9) prepare to deal with the question of cost-effectiveness. (JD)

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ADOPTION GUIDE

for the

COLLEGE *and* UNIVERSITY ADMINISTRATOR

PROJECT

SP011 309

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for

COLLEGE AND UNIVERSITY ADMINISTRATORS

Charles M. Wilson, Ed.D.

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INTRODUCTION

The Problem and Its Setting:

Colleges and universities for decades have been engaged in efforts to improve their programs for the professional preparation of teachers. These unending efforts have involved the scientific study of teaching and teachers, of learning and learners and have provided significant successes in designing beginning teacher training experiences which are sound in theory and are based upon a rather impressive knowledge of teaching and learning. Through these efforts we have learned how to prepare teachers who know good teaching theory and who know about good techniques for putting that theory into practice. In all too many cases, however, we have "taught about" how to teach. We have prepared teachers with a fairly sound knowledge of teaching but with rather weak experience in the practice of teaching. Most colleges and universities find it somewhat difficult to provide practical classroom application of teaching theory throughout a professional preparation program simply due to the logistical complications associated with placing teacher education students in public school classrooms. Therefore, simulation of these experiences has become a popular practice in teacher training.

A somewhat different, almost inverse, process has developed in graduate studies in teacher education. For the most part, graduate students in teacher education programs are practicing teachers. They face everyday the problems which were the basis of the simulated experiences of their earlier training, yet most programs of graduate study make no effort to capitalize on this situation. Teachers continue to be "taught about" better teaching practice. The sincere, professional teacher with

genuine concern for improving her teaching skills and her ability to provide improved learning for children attempts to put into practice those new ideas and those new teaching techniques about which she is learning in graduate studies. Inevitably these conscientious teachers discover unexpected problems associated with major changes in teaching practices. They most often have to struggle along with no support, assistance or advice and most importantly no reinforcement or feedback on the process. At times these teachers may also run aground as a result of differences in the philosophy of college professors and the philosophy of local school administrators or at least a difference in the perception of what constitutes good practice.

Given this same set of circumstances, a less professional, less sincere teacher who is involved in traditional graduate studies may in most cases experience complete success in her courses while making no changes whatever for the improvement of teaching and learning in her own classroom.

It appears therefore, that what results is a self-defeating cycle in which the sincere professional, for lack of support and coordination of efforts, too often fails in her efforts at change. Moreover, her less professional colleagues make no effort to change or improve and in turn suffer no negative consequences. The net result in either case is little change and little improvement in teaching and learning in our schools.

Project CLASS was designed to overcome this situation so that through a cooperative working relationship between public schools and colleges and universities the classrooms of in-service teachers could be used as laboratories for improving skills in teaching.

The Adoption Guide:

This document is intended to serve as an adoption guide for college

and university administrators. The procedures and processes employed by the staff in Project CLASS are shared with others not because they represent the suggestions of experts but simply because they have been tested in practice found to work. This pragmatic philosophy leads to the belief that if the assumptions outlined in this document are consistent with the philosophy of the college or university interested in adopting or adapting Project CLASS, then the procedures suggested should represent viable processes for the development of such a program.

I

A RATIONALE FOR COLLEGE/UNIVERSITY PARTICIPATION

Why should a college/university become directly involved with a public school system in the operation of a graduate teacher education program? How could a graduate studies program be improved by such a partnership? Answers to these questions might best be provided by exploring a set of assumptions basic to college and university participation in a cooperative arrangement such as Project CLASS:

1. The ultimate goal of graduate studies in education is the improvement of professional practice in teaching and learning. If professional practice is to be improved, it seems to follow that knowledge must be applied to the development of solutions to everyday problems of teaching; problems which are real and immediate to teachers and which if solved will result in increased learning for children.

2. The curriculum of graduate studies programs in teacher education should be practical and relevant to current educational problems. Philosophies and theories regarding education have always been and should continue to be a very important element in graduate studies programs for professional teachers. These philosophies and theories in all too many instances, however, are dealt with only at the awareness or understanding level. In very few instances are students involved with programs of study which require application of theory to practice in the classroom. The best measure of the practicality of a graduate

studies curriculum is its application to the solution of current problems in a school setting. As these solutions are tested in classrooms and evaluated as to their contributions to improved student learning, colleges and universities will be able to evaluate the efficacy of their programs.

3. College and university faculty members should take advantage of every opportunity possible to remain current with and aware of the real and everyday problems of teaching in elementary and secondary schools. Partnerships between colleges and universities and public schools for professional teacher education and improvement provide such opportunities. College and university staff members may improve their own competence in the process.

4. Colleges and universities should continue to serve as a staff development resource; a resource for professional renewal. Regardless of the ability of local school systems to provide staff development training for teachers from their own resources, it appears essential that college and university resources be utilized to inject new ideas, new practices, and to conduct research for the evaluation of the educational process.

5. The educational profession should have some input into its own training. Project CLASS provides a vehicle for local school systems and colleges and universities to join together in the identification of teacher training and in-service needs and the development and execution of graduate studies and/or staff development programs designed to meet those needs.

II

PROGRAM DEVELOPMENT ACTIVITIES

The following guidelines are suggested for the consideration of college and university administrators who are interested in the development of Public School/College and University cooperative programs such as Project CLASS. It is assumed that persons using these guidelines will have previously become familiar with the materials describing Project CLASS and how it operates as a combined graduate studies and staff development program for in-service teachers. The suggestions made here-in are based upon experience in conducting such a program and represent factors which should be considered in determining the feasibility of such a program for a college or university and in providing for its successful operation.

1. Establish a philosophic base of agreement within the faculty.

   Project CLASS represents a significant departure from traditional graduate studies. To many college faculty members its competency-based philosophy may seem inconsistent with their own beliefs about what constitutes a high quality program of graduate studies. There exists a great deal of misunderstanding in the profession regarding the concept of competency-based education. Few people agree as to its definition. It also is quite evident that field-based programs are more inconvenient and require more effort in early stages of development than would be required to maintain a traditional program design. All these factors point to the

importance of providing opportunities for faculty members who may be involved with or affected by such program changes to discuss and to analyze their own philosophic positions and to produce a set of "we believe" statements of philosophy regarding professional graduate studies. Information about competency-based program philosophy should be studied and discussed prior to and during meetings of this type. This process requires intensive study of the relationship between theory and practice and the most desirable balance between these factors in the program design. The philosophy of the faculty must be consistent with the philosophy of competency-based, field-oriented program design or major program changes will not be successful.

2. Provide a structure for faculty planning and involvement which includes both college faculty and public school professionals.

A planning structure must be provided in which responsibility is delegated for leadership in planning and which provides for organized and systematic involvement of faculty and public school personnel who would be involved with the program. The experience of the Project CLASS staff suggests that a faculty member and a public school administrator should each be given released time to meet together, develop and administer this process. Working together, such a team planned for and conducted a needs assesment in the target school system. The needs of the local school system served as the basis for program planning. The college faculty and public school personnel then participated together in an intensive workshop designed to (A) develop an understanding of competency-based, field-oriented programs through working with nationally known consultants, (B) study, analyze and classify needs of the local school system as reflected in the needs assessment, (C) convert needs statements into generic teaching competencies, and finally (D) to generate statements of teaching behavior which would indicate the attainment of each teaching competency.

Under the leadership of the faculty coordinator, seminars were held throughout the year for college faculty to contribute to and be made aware of program plans as they were developed. These seminars also provided opportunities for the project staff members to provide in-service training for college

faculty members related to teaching in the project.

Details of the program design and instructional sequence can best be planned and structured by one or two faculty members provided with released time for project development and administration. These program designs should in turn be reviewed in faculty seminars.

3. Provide for a management structure which shares decision making between the college or university and the public school system.

Project CLASS is a partnership between public schools and colleges and universities. It is essential, therefore, that the management structure for project operation represent both public school officials and college officials. Project CLASS has operated during the past year with a management committee consisting of three college officials and two public school officials. The project directors, one on the college campus and one in the public school system, administer the daily operations of the project. The directors meet with one other public school official and two other college officials at least quarterly to execute major project management decisions and review progress.

Management structures of this sort require colleges and universities to share with public school officials responsibility for decisions previously the sole prerogative of colleges. These decisions have in Project CLASS been limited to operational questions and not to academic decisions. College officials have continued to make decisions regarding academic credit and approval or disapproval of program elements as they relate to degrees offered by the College. Decisions have been shared, however, related to what will be taught because instruction is based on local needs. Decisions are also shared which relate to instructional procedure and how competence is determined. Public schools not only share decisions about program effectiveness but actually take the major responsibility

for assessing program effectiveness as it relates to the development of teacher competence. College officials must enter such programs with full awareness of the fact that decision making is a shared process. Understandings should, therefore, be developed between college and public school officials regarding what areas of decision making can and will be shared and what areas of decision making cannot be shared due to operational constraints or simple unwillingness to share these decisions.

4. Determine what system will be used for granting academic credit for the attainment of competence based on local school needs.

College and university officials interested in developing programs such as Project CLASS will need to determine how credit will be granted for attainment of competence related to school needs. The first decision to be made is how credit can be earned by a student and applied to a graduate degree. Under current arrangements Valdosta State College has permitted students to earn as much as half a Masters Degree through participation in Project CLASS. Credits earned through the project are subject to the same policies and regulations which apply to "off-campus" courses.

A more difficult decision involves the actual credit granted for the attainment of competence. Should the college develop an entirely new program of studies based on competency specified by local needs or should the college grant credit for existing courses within a traditional graduate program? After considering these alternatives, officials at Valdosta State College chose to grant credit for existing courses in cases where the objectives for these courses correspond with competency based on local school needs. Realizing that needs and competency based on needs would be somewhat different in each local school with which the college might work, new courses were arranged in which credit was granted for practicums in teaching. Through the use of these credits, programs of study can be individualized so that each participating teacher may obtain credit for improved competence in teaching skills

related to local school needs. This arrangement also leaves undisturbed the on-campus graduate program for students not involved in field-oriented programs. Under this arrangement approximately three-fourths (3/4) of the credits earned by each teacher would be granted from existing courses while approximately one-fourth (1/4) of the graduate credit would be earned in practicum.

5. Develop a staffing plan which provides for lower student/professor ratio than traditional graduate programs.

The instructional plan for Project CLASS calls for considerable interaction between the college professor and his students in an on-the-job, field setting. This arrangement quite obviously requires more time for the professor to make classroom observations and work with students largely on a one-to-one basis. While a professor can work successfully in most cases with about twenty (20) students in traditional graduate classes, experience has shown that Project CLASS professors cannot operate effectively with more than ten (10) students. Therefore, colleges and universities proposing to become involved in programs such as Project CLASS should make staffing plans based on a ten-to-one student/professor ratio. This does not seem to be an unreasonable staffing arrangement inasmuch as most practicums, internships and student teaching experiences are staffed on an even smaller ratio. If, however, the college simply cannot provide this staffing arrangement, then adjustments in the instructional sequence could be arranged so that even greater use of the peer panel might be made while using school district supervisors for resource/supervisory purposes within the instructional sequence. This would make it possible for the college professor to work more with individuals on acquiring competence while depending more heavily on local supervisors for the observation and verification of competence. Experience with Project CLASS, however, suggests that the instructional

sequence functions best when the entire sequence is entered into as a team effort involving peer teachers, local supervisors and the college professor.

6. Provide instructional resources appropriate for individualized study and which are transportable to a field setting.

Competency-based, field-oriented programs require large amounts of instructional materials appropriate for individualized study and which focus on performance skills in the classroom. Instructional materials of this type are readily available for purchase from several sources, and colleges and universities developing instructional programs such as Project CLASS can save great amounts of faculty time by acquiring such materials through purchase rather than requiring faculty members to develop their own original material. This does not suggest that all instructional material can be purchased and be made immediately applicable to the development of competency based on local school needs. Obviously a great deal of material will have to be designed specifically for the development of certain competencies. There is no need, however, to "reinvent the wheel" by attempting to produce original material when perfectly good instructional packages already exist. Therefore, colleges and universities along with public schools should use their locally developed set of competency statements as a "shopping list" to select commercially available instructional materials which address each competency statement. Where such materials are not available, faculty teams should be formed under the leadership of the faculty coordinator to produce appropriate instructional materials.

7. Provide a system for the storage, retrieval and management of individualized instructional materials.

Large amounts of instructional materials will be necessary for the operation of competency-based, field-oriented graduate studies programs. It will be necessary to develop a system for cataloging these materials so that they are readily usable by the instructional staff and by students. Project CLASS instructional materials have been cataloged according to the competencies which they address. Using competency statements as the indexing basis, a faculty member or student can locate by code number any or all modules or other instructional materials which might be of help in working on any one of the competency statements. The instructional materials library staff also cataloged instructional materials by subject and by author so that they could be located by more conventional library utilization procedures.

Project CLASS instructional materials are stored in an instructional materials center and their use is managed by a professional librarian. Instructional materials are provided by instructors to students as they agree upon a competency area in which to work. Where large amounts of such materials are needed, arrangements are made with the local school district Project CLASS Coordinator to have the materials stored in the local school and available to students at all times. Under this arrangement, the local Project Director is responsible for the management of the instructional materials.

8. Prepare process manuals for each major element of the program as it is developed by joint effort of the college or university and public school system(s).

In order for a program such as Project CLASS to function smoothly, a great deal of detailed planning is necessary. It is advisable during these stages of planning to produce written documents which outline each major component of the program. These documents then provide a record of "what we agreed upon" and are invaluable in orienting faculty and public school personnel to the program as they become involved. Not everyone can be involved in planning sessions, but all persons need an adequate orientation to the program which, experience has shown, is best provided by written documents which may be studied prior to actual involvement in orientation sessions. These documents provide a degree of structure for what could otherwise become a very nebulous, unstructured process. Such documents should be prepared for program components such as: (1) needs assessments in public schools, (2) generating teaching competency statements from local needs, (3) the instructional sequence, (4) modules and other instructional materials, (5) the system of observation and competency assessment, (6) project management in the college and public school.

9. Prepare to deal with the question of cost-effectiveness.

College administrators with any perception at all will recognize that a program such as Project CLASS will cost more than traditional graduate programs to operate. Faculty/student ratios are smaller, so that fewer credit hours are produced by each faculty member. Travel costs are greater due to the necessity of observation of participants by faculty members. Instructional materials costs are greater particularly at the outset of such a program. In addition to these factors, some faculty members may need to be provided with released time for planning in the early stages of development.

All these factors relating to higher costs would suggest that the college administrator should compare very carefully the costs of such a program to the cost of more traditional approaches to graduate studies. At the same time, however, administrators should compare the effectiveness of such programs with the effectiveness of more traditional programs in terms of observable changes and improvements in teaching and learning in school classrooms. Experience in operating such a program suggests that competency-based, field-oriented graduate programs may cost fully twice as much to operate as conventional programs. Yet evaluations of results suggest that changes are taking place in the classrooms of participating teachers where no such changes previously occurred when these same teachers were involved in traditional graduate studies programs. The problem faced by the college administrator at this point is that in most cases no assessment of the effectiveness of traditional graduate programs exists

with which to compare results. This situation precludes the possibility of precisely evaluating cost related to effectiveness at this stage. It does appear logical to assume, however, that due to the benefits obtained by the local school system in terms of improvement in professional practice the local educational agency should defray a proportionate share of the costs involved. This can be accomplished in Georgia through the use of State allocated staff development funds and State approved Adoption/Adaption grants under Title IVb, ESEA. All such possibilities should be explored vigorously by colleges and schools interested in cooperatively administered competency-based, field-oriented graduate programs aimed at improved professional performance.